

The James Jones Literary Society Newsletter

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Conference With Groom, Heinemann Tops Off Banner Year

Because of James Jones' long association with the military--first as a member of the Army in both peacetime and war, then as a writer who explored this experience persistently throughout his career--I have organized this presidential message around the familiar military orders "About face!" and "Forward march!"

First, I want to do an about face by looking back at the successful year which The James Jones Society has just concluded. Under the dynamic leadership of out-going president J. Michael Lennon, ably assisted by secretary Helen Howe and treasurer Juanita Martin, the Society dramatically increased its membership, improved its fiscal situation and expanded its activities to promote Jones' work and to encourage new writers.

Membership now stands at 230 individuals, representing 32 states and Canada. This constitutes an increase of 63 members since 1993. A healthy budgetary balance of more than \$10,000 has permitted the board to add \$500 to the current \$2,000 James Jones First Novel Fellowship and to begin awarding an annual James Jones Short Story prize of \$500 in 1995. The board also has grown to 20 members whose terms are now being staggered to assure continuity of leadership for the Society.

The fourth annual James Jones Society Conference, scheduled once again at the conveniently located campus of Lincoln Trail College in Robinson but held for the first time in October, drew more than 100 enthusiastic participants and featured a stimulating program of readings, panel discussions and multi-media presentations. Jerry Bayne prepared an impressive videotapes introduction for keynote speakers Winston Groom, author of *Forrest Gump*, and Larry Heinemann, author of *Paco's Story*. Both writers shared their perspectives of the Vietnam War. Kaylie Jones joined Groom in reading powerful passages from Jones' novel about Guadalcanal, *The Thin Red Line*, which also occasioned comments by George Hendrick and Michael Mullen.

Mary Kay Zuravleff received the James Jones First Novel Fellowship with an inspiring acceptance speech, leaving no doubt about why her novel-in-progress, *The Frequency of Souls*, was selected or about its eventual publication. Another highlight of this year's conference weekend conference was the public tour of the home Jones built in Marshall after *From Here To Eternity* became a bestseller. Thanks to the hospitality of Bill and Beth Schulz, its present owners, the house--which is both architecturally interesting and historically significant--was opened to conferencegoers for the first time.

As we conclude our fourth year of operation, The James Jones Society can take pride in this record of accomplishments, for which Mike Lennon, his fellow officers and other board members deserve our congratulations and gratitude. As we march forward into 1995, two new activities will expand our agenda. Thanks to the patient preparations of board members Carl Becker, Jon Shirota and Bob Thobaban, 18 Society members will spend the week of March 13-20 touring James Jones' Hawaii. The Society voted to contribute \$1,000 toward the cost of a bronze plaque in Jones' honor, which will be installed at Makapuu Point and dedicated at this time. The board also agreed that the best way to continue the Society's momentum is to undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process, which can help us identify and achieve our priorities in the future. Subsequent issues of the newsletter and meetings of the Society will provide further information on this process and invite your suggestions.

For now, let me thank all of you who have contributed to the Society's past success and ask you to continue your participation in its important work. With your support, 1995 can be our best year yet, building on the laudable legacy we have inherited.

--Judith L. Everson, President

Scholarship To Aid Creative Writing Students

The James Jones Society has established a \$500 creative writing scholarship program through Lincoln Trail College (LTC).

Applicants submit two short stories, each a minimum of 5,000 words, and must not have been previously published. Eligible applicants include high school seniors who will attend Lincoln Trail after graduation, current LTC students or previous LTC students.

For more information or to obtain application materials, contact the Lincoln Trail College Learning Resource Center at R.R. 3, Robinson, IL 62454, or call 618/544-8657. This year's submissions must be received by May 1.

Symposium Welcomes Special Guest

Frank Marshall of Philadelphia, Pa., was a special guest at the fourth annual James Jones Symposium in October. He was in F Company of the 27th Infantry Division along with Jones. The character of Sal "Friday" Clark in *From Here To Eternity* was drawn from Marshall, who also had the nickname of "Friday."

Marshall, now retired, is a member of the Pearl Harbor Survivor Association and the 25th Infantry Division Association "Tropic Lightning."

"It was very nice meeting you and all the rest of the wonderful people (at the conference)," he wrote. "My wife and I had a great time being with you all."

Members To Visit Hawaii In March

Eighteen members of The James Jones Society have so far signed on to make the March 13-20 trip to Hawaii to visit sights that had significance to James Jones.

The group also will be on hand for the dedication of a memorial plaque honoring Jones at Makapuu Point, where he and other members of his company from the 25th Infantry "Tropic Lightning" Division built bunkers and gun emplacements in November 1941.

Excursions planned for the travelers include visits to Schofield Barracks and Kolekole Pass, as well as other landmarks and locations that figure prominently in *From Here To Eternity*.

For more information about the trip, contact Carl Becker in Miamisburg, Ohio, at 513/866-4094 or Robert Thobaben in Centerville, Ohio, at 513/433-7800.

LETTERS TO THE SOCIETY

Fellowship has its privileges

I read with great interest and enthusiasm the Fall 1994 edition of The James Jones Society newsletter when it arrived in my mailbox las week. Congratulations on another successful year for the James Jones First Novel Fellowship and to Mary Kay Zuravleff, this year's winner.

My own life since those exciting days last fall when I received the inaugural First Novel Fellowship has been, as you might imagine, filled to the brim if not sometimes overflowing. I finished my master's degree at SUNY-Binghamton in January (1994) and then decided to stick around upstate New York for another couple of years until my son, Colin, finished school. This means I'll continue to work for Cornell--I'm now manager of the Cornell Information Technologies technical writing and publications production staff--and to spend most mornings enjoying "flextime" while I work on the final chapters of "Eden Undone." Soon it will be time to start hunting for an agent; hopefully, a publisher will follow after that.

...Winning the James Jones First Novel Fellowship continues to have a wonderful ripple effect in my own writing life; I wish Kary Kay the same and all the best.

--Nancy Flynn, Ithaca, NY, 1993 recipient of the James Jones First Novel Fellowship

Remember the spirit of James Jones

Willie Morris tells one of my favorite James Jones stories in the book, *James Jones: A Friendship*, written just after his death in 1977. The two had just met for the first time at a party for the Joneses in New York.

It was a hot July night in a crowded New York apartment without a workable air conditioner. After talking for a while, Morris writes:

"Holy shit, it's hot," he said. He proceeded to take off his coat and roll up his sleeves. I did likewise. We were standing near the bar, and he left momentarily to talk with some new arrivals. The gartender had vanished into the kitchen. Suddenly Ted Kennedy came up to me and extended his glass. "Another scotch and soda, please," he said. This swift motion took me by surprise. I made the drink and handed it to him. It took me a few seconds to realize he had mistaken me for the bartender. From a distance I noticed that this scene had not been lost on Jim Jones. He was laughing so hard he put his hand against the wall for support. Soon Kennedy came up to me again: "What were *you* doing there? Let me fix *you* a drink." When he left Jim walked over to me and said, "I told him you ain't the bartender, you're the fuckin' editor in chief of *Harper's Magazine*."

May The James Jones Society always remember the Jones of this Morris anecdote and honor that spirit for its importance in Jones' writing.

--Ray Elliott, Urbana, IL

Zuravlett Accepts Fellowship Award

I am delighted with this honor and with the chance to accept it in your company. It is a wonderful added touch for the Society to bring me here not only to receive this award, but also to hear the many stories you have to tell. The affection that the family, friends and readers of James Jones express is a lasting tribute to him, and I am truly grateful to receive the award that you have begun in his memory.

When I read the remarks of last year's winner, I heartily agreed with her statement that writers have a mission to record "all that feels vital" as well as a responsibility to nurture and support one another. In fact, I was tempted to begin a tradition of rereading her acceptance speech, thereby taking the pressure off me and future winners of this award.

But then it seemed only appropriate to tell you specifically what the fellowship means in my life.

You have given me some recognition, a vote of confidence, a sign. One story I wanted to tell you took place the winter before last, just after my son, Theo, was born. I had been optimistic about revising and wrapping up this novel, but then his care, though given in joy and shared with by my husband, drained me of energy and some hope.

Meanwhile, I was becoming adept at a new set of tasks; for example, I could change Theo's diaper in complete darkness. It so happens that a white plastic diaper is luminous enough on its own for one to distinguish the plain white back of the diaper from the patterned front, and when the cold months came, I witnessed a phenomenal occurrence. In the winter dark of our nursery, the air dry enough to require the constant steam of a humidifier, the act of ripping open the tape tabs on my son's diaper caused sparks to fly on either side of his tiny hips.

The novel I am desperate to finish is about electricity and love, and how you choose what to believe. Perhaps incidentally, no other parents have corroborated this vision. And so it comforted me to think that even during the most hectic period of my life to date, I would see sparks from time to time, and I knew I would find a way to broadcast them, just as I am doing to you now. This award is a much-needed spark.

You have also given me the means to take time away to focus on writing. After all, James Jones got halfway from here to eternity on a \$500 advance from Maxwell Perkins. I edit books and exhibition text for the Smithsonian, and our small staff is constantly on deadline. In the hopes of using the fellowship to make progress, I asked my boss for a month of leave, fully expecting her to say it was not possible. But she agreed in large part because of your recognition. I was discreet about my plans, lest everyone suddenly want a month off, but each person I chose to tell offered her house as a place to write, including one complete stranger who had sent me some work for a critique. Prime real estate was thrown at my feet, with comforts of cats and gardens balanced against the promise of a well-stocked refrigerator. So this award has granted me opportunities both requested and unexpected, and it has made me recognize that when you give an award like this, you honor and bolster not only the writer but everyone who encourages the writer.

For all of this, I thank you. Ultimately, I think that what may be the most important gift from The James Jones Society, and the reason I have been composing stories to tell you ever since I got the news, is that you have given me an audience. In writing, as in cooking, it is hard to predict what someone will savor and what flavors will be remembered after the meal is over. Writers are determined to cook and clean up and burn and overseason and binge and purge and defat and flambe and rebuild the kitchen and skim and baste and broil, all in hopes that some will gather to eat. Your recognition is encouragement to me to get cooking, in hopes that eventually people might gather around the table.

In addition to being about electricity and love, my novel-in-progress is also about life after death. The best case scenario, the main character believes, is that the memory of the good you do outlives you. The object of his affection, however, believes that extinguished lives are smoldering on some frequency like audible fossils, and, using satellite communicatinos, she is listening for the bones of souls. It turns out, at least in this book, that she is right and that people from the past are readily available on the FM dial, just to the left ob public radio. It is with these notions in my imagination that I praise James Jones, a great writer who is at the same time no longer and very much with us. This fellowship is truly a great honor of your devotion to him and your believe in me, and I thank you very, very much.

--Mary Kay Zuravleff, Washington, D.C.

Jones' Letters Reveal A Portrait Of The Artist

Society board member and University of Illinois English professor George Hendrick edited the 1989 collection of Jones' letters, *To Reach Eternity* (Random House).

Author Larry Heinemann, who was a guest speaker at the 1994 symposium, wrote of the collection:

"These are remarkably rich letters. A writer's letters are always intriguing and revealing, and Jones' are particularly blunt and frank and make clear his work as a writer and his life as a man. He was a complicate man who spoke what was on his mind. Jones was a great American writer and a master of his craft."

The following is an excerpt from Hendrick's book. It is part of a letter, dated March 16, 1947, from Jones to editor Maxwell Perkins:

"The truth is things arent going so well. I had thought the damn thing would be finished by now. I think I'm getting so I'm almost afraid of it, which is something that never happened to me before. (Maybe it did; I think maybe it happened in the Keys when I was working on 'Laughter' and now I've forgotten it because it's past.) I have a fear of failing that I never used to have. I think it's because I've never actually published anything. I guess it's silly, but I keep feeling like I should have published something by now.

"I dont need to tell you: writing is my life, if I couldnt write I dont know where the hell I'd be. But writing without publishing is like eating with swallowing.

"...Yet, one thing I do know, whether I ever learn the form of technique: I can write, with true emotion and perception and the right values of the things I've seen....In fact, I can write anything, I can write everything; but I havent yet learned how to make it properly selective. Any time a scene hits me emotionally I can sit down and write it, with the true emotion...."

Short Stories And Articles By Jones

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